

§91.43

(d) HHS will return to the complainant any complaint outside the jurisdiction of these regulations, and will state the reason(s) why it is outside the jurisdiction of these regulations.

§91.43 Mediation.

(a) HHS will promptly refer to a mediation agency designated by the Secretary all sufficient complaints that:

(1) Fall within the jurisdiction of the Act and these regulations, unless the age distinction complained of is clearly within an exception; and,

(2) Contain all information necessary for further processing.

(b) Both the complainant and the recipient shall participate in the mediation process to the extent necessary to reach an agreement or make an informed judgment that an agreement is not possible.

(c) If the complainant and the recipient reach an agreement, the mediator shall prepare a written statement of the agreement and have the complainant and the recipient sign it. The mediator shall send a copy of the agreement to HHS. HHS will take no further action on the complaint unless the complainant or the recipient fails to comply with the agreement.

(d) The mediator shall protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of the mediation process. No mediator shall testify in any adjudicative proceeding, produce any document, or otherwise disclose any information obtained in the course of the mediation process without prior approval of the head of the mediation agency.

(e) The mediation will proceed for a maximum of 60 days after a complaint is filed with HHS. Mediation ends if:

(1) 60 days elapse from the time the complaint is filed; *or*

(2) Prior to the end of that 60-day period, an agreement is reached; *or*

(3) Prior to the end of that 60-day period, the mediator determines that an agreement cannot be reached.

This 60-day period may be extended by the mediator, with the concurrence of HHS, for not more than 30 days if the mediator determines that agreement will likely be reached during such extended period.

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(f) The mediator shall return unresolved complaints to HHS.

§91.44 Investigation.

(a) *Informal investigation.* (1) HHS will investigate complaints that are unresolved after mediation or are reopened because of a violation of a mediation agreement.

(2) As part of the initial investigation HHS will use informal fact finding methods, including joint or separate discussions with the complainant and recipient, to establish the fact and, if possible, settle the complaint on terms that are mutually agreeable to the parties. HHS may seek the assistance of any involved State program agency.

(3) HHS will put any agreement in writing and have it signed by the parties and an authorized official at HHS.

(4) The settlement shall not affect the operation of any other enforcement effort of HHS, including compliance reviews and investigation of other complaints which may involve the recipient.

(5) The settlement is not a finding of discrimination against a recipient.

(b) *Formal investigation.* If HHS cannot resolve the complaint through informal investigation, it will begin to develop formal findings through further investigation of the complaint. If the investigation indicates a violation of these regulations HHS will attempt to obtain voluntary compliance. If HHS cannot obtain voluntary compliance it will begin enforcement as described in §91.46.

§91.45 Prohibition against intimidation or retaliation.

A recipient may not engage in acts of intimidation or retaliation against any person who:

(a) Attempts to assert a right protected by the Act or these regulations; *or*

(b) Cooperates in any mediation, investigation, hearing, or other part of HHS' investigation, conciliation, and enforcement process.

§91.46 Compliance procedure.

(a) HHS may enforce the Act and these regulations through:

(1) Termination of a recipient's Federal financial assistance from HHS